

Embodiment of Environmental Legacy: **Walking in E-Textiles and Thoughts from my Basement**

Jackie Donovan

University of Washington
jacdonovan@gmail.com

Abstract

It was the many possibilities of witnessing embodiment that I felt was especially pertinent to my artist research. Therefore, the outputs of my e-textile were sounds that altered in frequency and speed as I came into proximity to different elements in the landscape. I created such an e-textile to challenge my own interpretations of what they are and could be as a creative, tactile tool for learning about the embodied experience of a space—all during a pandemic.

Walking

As I write this, it has been six months since schools across the country have shut down. The University of Washington was the first university to start what would become a nationwide trend of schools closing campuses and moving online as they tried to grasp the realities of the pandemic. Feeling whiplashed and shocked, I sit here now, in my basement, holding the pieces of my last year together. I grieved, raged, sat, marched, and crafted, but most importantly, like so many others, I walked. As the pandemic continued to claim some lives and shake up others, I continued walking. I began connecting my research and design of e-textiles to this daily practice. Movement in space is required for e-textile to work as an art piece. Walking produces the results of movement that makes this e-textile a tactile art experience. This piece intends to explore the concept of walking while wearing e-textiles as an approach to exploring landscapes. It also explores the nuances of digital art and its ability to underscore the importance of personal encounters with post-industrial landscapes. Yet,

my real intent for this thesis was to walk and exist in my making, therefore living the embodied experience of place.

Ultimately my basement bedroom has been the start and finish of each journey. There were no two different sites that I began or ended with, and that is how I looked at walking—not a means to an end, but as a means unto itself, a meandering mode of embodiment in the landscape. This was my process, which Deleuze and Boyman (2001, 29) describe as a dynamic state of “between-moments.” I emphasize this state of “between-moments” because walking is ultimately about connection to spaces, the betweenness that binds each place to the next—and thus it is a moment of importance in and of itself. Walking becomes a mode of shifting and modifying landscape through desire. As shifting and modifying is formed by body, how we shift and modify is informed by landscape. In this way, the body can transport itself though the



Fig. 1. *Embodying the Environmental Legacy piece*, 2020, Jackie Donovan, cotton/canvas, copper tape, Arduino.

landscape with ease. When embracing the ideology of between moments there is a sense of importance to flow, movement, and connection. Walking is a tool to rationalize our changing surroundings, allowing us to understand our environment. Therefore, these “between-moments,” and the flux that characterizes them, are essential to understanding my approach to this abstract.

E-textile

This e-textile design, which I call the *Embodiment of Environmental Legacy* aims to amplify systems thinking while binding the body to land through walking. While stitching the e-textile, I envisioned a post-industrial urban landscape as a perfect challenge for utilizing the piece. In her book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World; On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Anna Tsing describes a capitalist ruin as a landscape that recognizes the damage wrought by the “history of the human concentration of wealth through making both humans and non-humans into resources for investment.” Tsing ultimately identifies a capitalist ruin as “spaces of abandonment for asset production” (2015, i), which is exactly what a post-industrial site embodies. Walking in e-textiles became a new meaningful journey to understand “capitalist ruins.”

I started with a set intention to explore a space that has been entirely altered by production and industry. I wanted a sense of discovery to explore objects within that landscape by wearing my e-textiles. The lure was intensified by the idea of finding hidden aspects of “what once was” (Tsing, 2015, x) peeking out at the edge of the waterfront. The site I selected for my exploration of landscape while wearing my e-textiles is a superfund site, the Duwamish River’s industrial waterfront. The river bears witness to the transformation of landscape as a result of America’s focus on shaping nature into a tool of capitalistic efficiency. By straightening the river, the main function of the Duwamish River became more about production rather than the local ecology. I wanted to explore these capitalist ruins to suspend my bias on what landscape should be.

References

- Deleuze, G., and A. Boyman,. 2001. *Pure immanence: essays on a life*. New York: Zone Books.
- Tsing, A. 2015. *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Biography

Jackie Donovan is a designer/researcher/artist/plant mom/pen pal depending on the context. She is a simple humanoid that recently graduated as a Master of Landscape Architecture candidate at the University of Washington. Her research explores the environmental legacy and phenomenology of site through e-textiles. She aims to curate meaningful moments of environmental intimacy by amplifying the human experience within space/place. She is always looking for ways to engage in feminist practice, speculative design, and soft art. Mostly though, when not working she likes to hang out with buddies while looking at plants and fungi, watch Youtube tutorial and commentary videos, and sketch stuff around her.



Fig. 2. *Fabric Speaker*, 2020, Jackie Donovan, cotton/canvas, copper tape, Arduino.